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## **Repetition and Nature**

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## Introduction

*"The implicit underlying subject matter of modern art is always the personality of the artist in its encounter with the world- the often painful intersection of psychological forces, intellect, society and event"*

- Jonathan Fineberg, *Art since 1940: Strategies of Being*

I consider myself the type of person who is looking to improve what I recognize is my passion for creating and innovating. I have always had a strong interest in using materials, forms, colors, and textures, the surrounding environment, and viewers.

The study of art and design allows me to pursue this interest.

I am combining my background as an Industrial Designer with my most recent experience as a furniture artist. These two disciplines in my life have helped me to understand how my work during the last 10 years can be situated into the modern movements called contemporary art and contemporary design.

Today I am looking to understand the best way to incorporate art and design into a compositionally solid language able to communicate to the viewer visually and functionally. The art component establishes a visual communication between the viewer and my conceptual ideas; whereas the design element comes to play a more aesthetic and ergonomic function. These ideas form a union between the conceptual art movement and design as a movement looking for future innovations.

I feel that I am part of a cycle, and I see this cycle as corresponding to a specific place and moment in time.

My interaction with different experiences in each period of time has given me different types of information, visually and emotionally.

Today, as a more mature person, I feel I that can use my ability and passion for expressing me as a designer or as an artist to release some of those experiences and reveal their effects upon my cycle.

Here, I intend to describe some of those past experiences in my life that helped me to develop a personal desire for being the builder of my own ideas and inventions.

In the first part, I present artists I feel connected to and I consider their influence on my body of work. Next, I give attention to each piece in my thesis body of work, describing their main characteristics, materials and techniques. I show what I want to express in each piece and how they relate to each other as well as other pieces I have made during my two years in the program. Finally, my conclusion shows how I see my future ideas can keep growing as an artist, as I develop my furniture style line to sustain my life as a furniture designer and maker.

## **Artist's influence**

### **George Nakashima**

Japanese American artist, designer and woodworker

George Nakashima is one of the most important personalities to consider in the American Craft and Studio Furniture Movement. He showed a deep understanding about the relationship between “high quality furniture design” and “woodwork craft”. His background as an Architect designer, plus his passion for nature and appreciation for trees, helped him to build a

business that would sustain him for the rest of his life as one of the most important primary players in The American Studio Furniture Movement.

Nakashima's genius comes from his extraordinary ability to mix Eastern and traditional construction methods, together with the aesthetic form, and design of early Colonial America. This mixture allowed him to create beautiful classical pieces, a body of work characterized by having a unique language with high performance of craftsmanship, perfect use of materials related with his strong passion and relationship for nature; and an exceptional design quality coming from his undergraduate and graduate Architecture studies.



I feel attracted to Nakashima's work because it encloses a cohesive design vocabulary, something that has distinguished Nakashima since he started to work as a furniture woodworker. Simple classical shapes and forms can be fixed into any environment, even better they have been recognized as contemporary pieces of art for the last 70 years. It is something I am strongly attracted to achieve in my own future career.



George Nakashima has inspired me because he showed in his work a strong passion for nature; people can experience this feeling by interacting with any of his pieces because he is using natural boards from beautiful trees and giving them a second opportunity to be part of our environment instead of being disintegrated to be used for other purposes.

I would like to support this idea with some of his phrases:

***"A tree provides perhaps our most intimate contact with nature"***

***"Each tree, each part of each tree has its own particular destiny and his own relationship to be fulfilled"***

***"We work with boards from these trees to fulfill their yearning for a second life to release their richness and beauty"***

In my family of work I am interested to put in practice the same theory; I consider I can use those elements nature can offer and give them a second significance or purpose for our own benefit. The difference between Nakashima's work and my work is that for me I am using natural elements to change their appearance; from being organic pieces to acquire a more sculptural



significance in my furniture, instead of being functional elements as in Nakashima's work.

In George Nakashima's work we can see how he found a strong but very simple way to work with boards from different trees and without changing the appearance of those boards he is able to incorporate them into functional pieces of furniture; his work is characterized by that natural feeling George was able to preserve in the lumbers he used to design his furniture. In my case, I want to use any element nature can offer to me, a rock, a piece of trunk or branch, water, fire and the like, and give to them a more aesthetic point of view, almost like a piece of sculpture isolated into a furniture piece. `



### Jesus Soto

The master pieces of Jesús Soto were my first visual contact with art. Back in my own country, Venezuela, my first experience visiting art galleries and museums was influenced by this extraordinary painter, Kinetic sculpture and master of fine arts.



Back in the 1960's emerged an art movement called "Op Art", described by the work of a growing group of abstract painters. Optical Art is a

mathematically-themed form of Abstract art; which uses repetition of simple forms and colors to create vibrating effects.

Jesús-Rafael Soto was one of the pioneers of this movement, he started as a painter but what really characterized Soto were his Kinetic sculptures when he started to incorporate to his paints wires and rods of metal in front of the background. This strategy helped Soto's pieces acquire a more sculptural dimension.

It is here when I felt attracted for the first time when I saw one of his sculptural pieces. I remember I was visiting the gallery with my mother when I saw a yellow cube shape floating in the air and suspended by nylon wires, then I saw how as a viewer we can interact with his pieces. Depending on the angle of the viewer, plus the action of moving in front of the piece, the visual effects that are created between those wires and the background can cause an affect of distortion in the eye of the viewer.

That is why I feel attracted to Soto's work, because the rules that the viewer's eye use to try to make sense of a visual image are themselves the "subject" of the artwork; so it means for me that his pieces transform into art pieces after the viewer's interaction, his art concept depends on the viewer moving in front of his pieces in order to create an optical effect (Optical Art).



We can see in these pieces that energy is one of the most striking elements of Soto's work and his experiments with optical effects by using repetition in order to create an illusion in the eye of the viewer. This theory is something I have put in practice in



some of my pieces since I started my graduate program, but also it is part of my body of work.

I can see how I feel a strong desire for making things by the obsessive use of repetition. Of course, I do not have a mature understanding of how I can achieve that sensation of distortion in the eye of the viewer and incorporate some of that Optical Art concept in my pieces of furniture. However, I consider I am using a repetitive exercise of materials, textures or colors; as a technique in order to create a new form or shape, this process of repetition is giving me some sort of introduction and a better understanding about how a viewer can interact with a piece of furniture and experience different sensations depending on the angle the viewer is looking at the piece.

In my family of work I am repeating elements, natural organic pieces and textures that generate a cohesive rhythmic language into my body of work. I cannot compare my work with Jesús Soto; but I can see the influence I took from his work when I interrelated with his art in my early age by using repetition as an obsessive use to generate interesting shapes and forms attracted to the viewer.

### **Andy Goldsworthy**

Andy Goldsworthy is an extraordinary British artist whose collaboration with nature produces uniquely personal and intense work. He showed in his work passion for nature and how he is able to use those changes nature suffers through time, to incorporate them into his art work.

He is one of the most recent artists I have been interested in for the last year, since I started to know about him during my introduction as an artist in my experience at Herron School of Art and Design.

I discovered an interesting attraction to his concept because he is working with nature; his art depends on the amount of time he spends outside researching and



experimenting with materials he finds during his continuous interaction with nature. This action reminds me of how much I enjoyed my childhood playing outside and finding any element nature offered to me to build something from that.

I feel very close and attracted to my passion and relationship with nature. I also can say that I need that contact in order to disconnect myself from my daily life and find a place to relax and think properly about myself and reorganize ideas.

This passion has made me realize that I want to use elements found outside from nature to incorporate them into my furniture pieces. These elements can be, as I mentioned before, a piece of trunk, a branch, a rock, and the like. I am proposing in my family of work that these elements can be used to be part of my furniture pieces, they do not need to be



functional, instead I am more attracted to the idea of using them to be more figurative pieces, something that can be isolated from the furniture to be admired as a sculptural piece.

My interest in Andy Goldsworthy as a reference artist is not about his art concept, because it is totally different from mine; he depends on the weather – rain, sun, snow, hail, calm; to create his art. He is using everyday natural elements and cycles to formulate his art concept, whereas I am taking an organic object or element from nature to incorporate it into a piece of furniture.





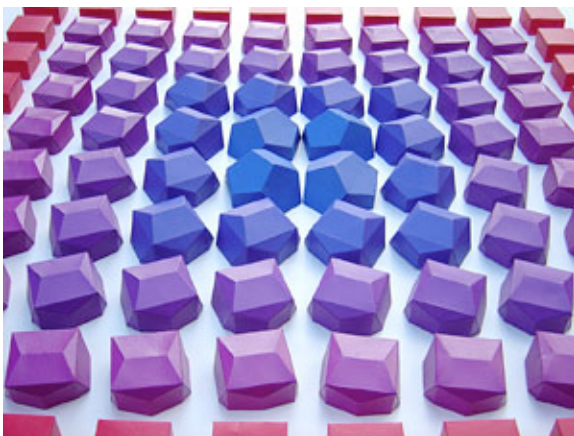
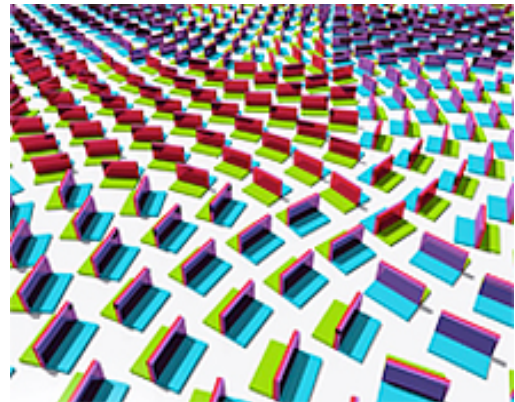
In my case, that element I find outside represents for me the chance to use it as a portion of a whole piece of furniture.

My interest on Goldsworthy's work is about the vocabulary he uses to defend his art concept. I consider his explanations are very rich in words and theories to use them as a reference to defend my introduction into the art world. Without mentioning the enormous draw I feel for his art, today he is one of my favorite artists.

### **Arturo Quintero**

Arturo Quintero is a young artist from Venezuela; Quintero's concept is based on his studies of science and geometric forms. For him, the geometric is the base that forms the universe. This idea is something that is not frequently found in the history of art, but his idea is obvious for the world of esthetic, symbolic and nature.

My relationship with Arturo Quintero is a different story. Back in Venezuela I had the opportunity to be one of the people in charge of building his pieces. Arturo Quintero uses the company I was working in Venezuela as an outsourcing to transform his idea from 2D design into 3D design. My job was to build his

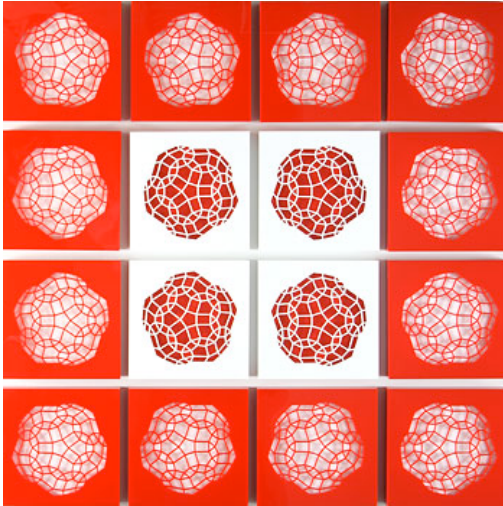


pieces after they have been processed through the CNC router machine or laser cutting machine.

He uses one of my favorite software platforms, Auto-Cad. All of these helped me for first time to be close to an artistic concept. I noticed how an artist can be

the creator of a concept and from that is able to build a cohesive family of work characterized by his own language and style.

Arturo Quintero's work plays with three dimensional forms to create an illusion in the mind of the viewer.



As three dimensional objects, his pieces have the ability to allow the viewer to walk around them and experience different perspectives of the piece. It can change the form and volume in the eye of the spectator. The use of geometric forms and simple math is presented in Quintero's work as well as repetition; this combination gives to his pieces an optical sensation that the viewer is able to create by interacting in front of a Quintero's piece.

In my family of work repetition is one of those features I am interested in exploring as a medium to function as a visual effect attractive to the eye of the viewer. I consider this body of work has helped me to create a starting point; in the future I would like to explore more optical art as a reference to incorporate new ideas into my furniture pieces.

## **Description of my family of work**

### **Collograph Printing cabinet**

This cabinet is the result of mixture of media between Printmaking and Furniture design.

It is very simple in shape and functionality, but with a very uncommon veneering technique which is the main center of attraction to this piece. The cabinet required a very simple construction process; it is made of Medium-density fiberboard



plus some organic natural elements that were added to the cabinet as a visual aesthetic ingredient. The cabinet was wrapped with paper; this paper was previously printed by using a printmaking technique called Collograph; I used the printing paper to incorporate a new attractive way to veneer a piece of furniture plus the infinite types of textures and finishing that can be used through the use of this Printmaking technique.

The cabinet was made with the idea of being used to show the prints, they represent nature and in a very personal perspective the process in nature I feel attracted to, such as erosion, deterioration and ageing. I feel comfortable making Collographs because I find in this technique a powerful way to express myself to be the creator of my own nature.



The Collograph also has another intention; the colors and appearance were used to match the organic elements presented in the piece, such as the handles which are river rocks and the branch attached in the left side of the cabinet. Everything works together in a perfect harmony in order to express my appreciation for nature, plus the influence of nature embodying into my family of work.

The way this cabinet fixes into my body of work is related with my sense for achieving a purely aesthetic sculptural piece, where the viewer can find extremely interest interacting with the sensation the Collograph produces; very organic and natural, so unique that the functionality of the cabinet passes to a second level. The addition of the branches and rocks come to integrate even more that natural appearance, besides, it is something I have been using in other pieces.

### **OSB Lounge table**

This table was designed with the idea of using a very uncommon material. Oriented strand board (OSB) is used in building constructions and its appearance is rough and variegated, something that is uncommon to use in the furniture market. I also experimented with fiber glass



and resin to add structure at the time I was journeying the table, this idea presents an unexpected way to join wood but very effective in durability and flexibility, a technique that will preserve the table keeping it in good condition. Since the table is simple in



shape and functionality, I added a central piece (second level) to attract the attention of the viewer. This level is a piece of wood wrapped with paper with the same Collograph technique mentioned before; the central piece is encircled by river rocks in order to separate the table itself from the print, giving the print more importance.

Because I am interested to find new ways to explore with materials, OSB was an excellent choice. This material is very accessible and cheap. I know, as a designer, the importance of having an excellent finishing in my pieces; that is why this project has attracted me because finding the method to make something from rough to luxury is an interesting approach to see potential in the use of these types of materials. Other characteristic of this table is the print, I used the same type of wood to prepare my plates to make the Collograph. It gave me an interesting match between the table and the print, whereas the rocks where a perfect way to incorporate nature into this table. Between both, the rough texture of the wood plus the use of rocks, I achieved that sensation of deterioration we see in the cycles of nature, very similar to the cabinet mentioned before, the author of my own nature organic nature.

Between this table and my cabinet I am looking for expressing myself and the way I see nature has an important influence in my life. We are surrounded by nature and I consider that contact is important for us. The way nature changes us or the way we are intimate with nature is something I am trying to represent in my body of work.



*“The feelings I see on nature are different than the rest of the viewer’s feelings”*

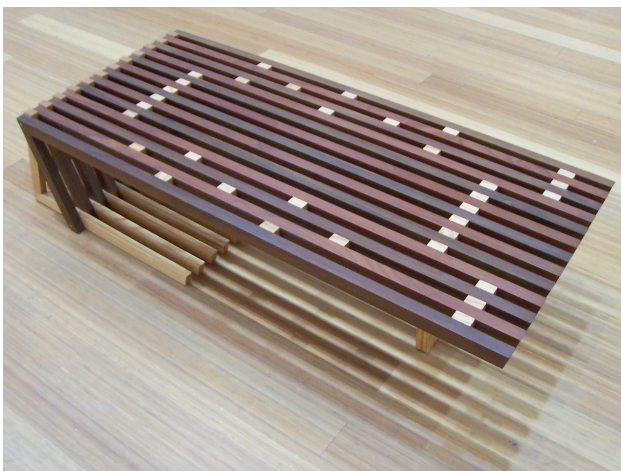
## Coffee table

Coffee tables are my favorite furniture pieces to build. They are the central attraction of many houses, and for me coffee tables have the power to unify people proximate around them.

It is important to respect the power of a coffee table. I



think it is the most important piece to consider in a family of furniture pieces. This coffee table is made of two different specimens of wood, IPE and Red Oak. The dark brown color of the IPE plus the clear creamy and red color of the Red Oak make a perfect combination because they contrast to each other harmoniously.



For this coffee table, I chose repetition to be the main concept of this design. Firstly, because I wanted to achieve an interesting unique design to amplify the power coffee tables have. Secondly, because the two wood choices gave me a perfect contrast of colors to play with. By repeating pieces in similar shapes and

dimensions I can combine them in different ways to create variety of forms. I am playing with this idea to generate negative spaces which help to create shadows on the floor depending on the angle the table is exposed to the light. Between the repeating process

to create attractive forms plus the shadows it creates I am generating a visual effect to the eye of the viewer. In future pieces, I would like to experiment even more deeply with this idea in order to get close to Optical art; I consider this art movement can be an interesting approach to be incorporated into furniture pieces.

This piece brings to my family of work, a different language than the other ones with the prints. Instead of having prints to attract the attention of the viewer I am using repetition as the main focus of interest for the viewer to interact with. I consider that this piece shows a different language than the others, because it has not that relationship with nature and organic elements explained in the pieces above. So, the next two tables I decided to make for my family of work show a combination between repetition and nature; that is why I feel this table is the transition that helped me approximate to combine both concepts.

### **Fountain table**



This table is part of two similar visual designs. The idea is to solidify my two passions and concepts. Nature and repetition are the two ideas that integrate the next two tables.

This table is very low in height with its principal form made of MDF (Medium-density

fiberboard) and with a very minimalistic simple shape. Half of the table is covered by IPE wood previously prepared to be incorporated to the table as a repetitive element,

whereas, the other half of the table has a water fountain with rocks at the bottom of the fountain. The rocks plus the water are natural elements used to represent nature in this table. I used a colored rock that is trying to match the color of the wood, while the base of the table is completely white in order to stimulate the use of the elements exposed on both sides of the table.

With this idea and design concept, I feel I am integrating my two concepts of this family of work. By unifying them in one solid piece, I am able to communicate to the viewer my appreciation for nature plus my obsession to use repetition as a visual communication element. With this table I am breaking the transition in the first table explained before, to give origin to a more cohesive language where repetition and nature play together. In our physical world nature refers to the phenomena of life, physics, energy and the cycles nature repeats again and again in order to stay alive. This table is trying to express to the viewer these feelings; it is trying to say that it is alive and is expressing it through pure energy, movement and repetition.

As I mentioned before with this table, the transitions have been taken apart to show a unification of ideas. For me, there is no doubt how nature and repetition can be related to each other. In this family of work this table comes to show more obviously that the energy coming from nature or coming from repetition has been used to run with the flow of a more cohesive combination between two concepts.





## Hanging installation



This table has a very similar characteristic as the table above, it is made of MDF, IPE wood and has a piece of cedar wood used to show as a visual sculptural piece. It is simple in shape and functionality, but very complex in the way it interacts with the interior space. It has a low surface that can be used to place objects, but its main functionality is to hold a piece of Cedar wood in one extreme of the table. This Cedar wood piece was the inspiration to make this table. The first time I saw this piece I was

fascinated with the appearance the Cedar wood has, it looks elderly by the time the piece was exposed to the conditions outdoors. I consider this quality fascinating because it is the result of nature working on the wood piece, for me something to admire. That is why I did not change the appearance of the Cedar piece at all in order to show what I consider is its beauty.

So, my starting point to make this table was the Cedar piece of wood. It has so much information I want to share with the viewer that looks like a sculpture piece. When I see it I can perceive nature was responsible for transforming a piece



of wood into a sculptural piece, it was the perfect excuse to incorporate nature into a design. The same way my prints have that look, the same way this wood gave me that feeling. The next step was to design a furniture piece capable to relate the Cedar piece into the interior space. That is when the idea of using a very long table with two extremes was a perfect solution I found to hook the wood piece from the wall but at the same time being part of a furniture piece. More than a furniture piece, it is an installation collaborating and offering changes to the environment.

This installation poses a very strong personality into my family of work; it has the best of both concepts plus a special ingredient. Repetition, nature, minimalistic style, plus the use of a wall to install the piece, these are features that change drastically the way viewer, space and the piece relate to each other. Everything together has been designed to show a perfect balance. Without any doubt it is my favorite piece in this family of work. Using this mature concept, as an artist it is something I want to continue to explore even more.

## Conclusion

This paper and my body of work presented at the Graduate Student Show (Herron School of Art and Design) results from a process of new experiences in my life related with conceptual visual Art and furniture design.

This new chapter in my life as an artist has helped me add to my background new perspectives from completely different angles. Today, I am able to recognize the ability I have as an Industrial Designer for building, finding and appreciating new ways to interact with the viewer and environment, but after the conclusion of my program I feel I have developed another side of my personality related with the ability I possess to communicate, to interact with my surroundings using visual communication to generate questions in the mind of the viewer.

Combining design and art I feel I have the tools necessary to embrace different ways of visual communication between the viewer and myself depending on the message I want to provide.

This body of work is my introduction to create and making visually effective furniture designs. The projects I presented in this paper were completely new experiences for me, experimenting with new materials and techniques. Future experiences will give me new challenges and opportunities to improve my own artistic language; it will be a cycle to develop mature concepts into a cohesive group of projects. I do not know if I will continue working with the same concepts using repetition and nature, but I know I will find new ways to challenge the interaction with viewers as I experiment with my ideas, visually and functionally.



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